

Tokyo ring will be a lab

World Championship Wrestling's "Starrcade at the Tokyo Dome" on March 21 will be more a series of experiments than a pro wrestling show.

This will be the first attempt to expose the Japanese version of pro wrestling to American fans. The faster-paced style, which is more grounded in athleticism and is shorter on showmanship, steroid-bloated bodies and gimmicks, has made pro wrestling the third-most popular sport in Japan behind baseball and sumo wrestling.



**NO
HOLDS
BARRED**

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

But can it blend with the American style of wrestling? And can American audiences, which with the exception of hard-core fans have had no exposure to Japanese wrestling, be educated to appreciate the differences?

The show, which is expected to draw in excess of 50,000 fans — the largest crowd in the 43-year history of the WCW (formerly the National Wrestling Alliance), will air on pay-per-view in this country April 7.

This will be the first wrestling show from foreign shores to be televised into the United States. It will also be only the second pay-per-view show aired on a tape-delay basis, and at \$9.95 it will be the least expensive. WCW's pay-per-view events normally go for \$19.95, while World Wrestling Federation events range from \$24.95 to \$29.95.

The show will be headlined by a clash of world championship claimants with remarkable similarities. WCW's Ric Flair has had seven reigns as world champion, a pro-wrestling record. He was generally considered the best wrestler in the United States for most of the '80s and has been called the best ever. He will face Tatsumi (Dragon) Fujinami, who is recognized in Japan as world heavyweight champion and whose four titles are a Japanese record. Fujinami was Japan's best wrestler for most of the '80s and as good as anyone that country has produced.

Both are noted primarily for their stamina, so the match may be a long one. If it's also a successful one, the plan is to rematch Flair and Fujinami on pay-per-view May 19 from St. Petersburg, Fla.

The WCW's Tokyo Dome card will be edited down to just under two hours for U.S. consumption. Most of the matches that air will involve wrestlers from the WCW facing wrestlers from New Japan Pro Wrestling, which is promoting the card.

The match hard-core fans may look forward to the most involves 195-pound Jushin (Thunder) Riger, considered by many the most spectacular wrestler in the world. Although he has never wrestled in the United States, Riger is a favorite among American videotape traders for his suicidal maneuvers and has won several awards from wrestling newsletters. Riger, recognized as world junior heavyweight champion in Japan, faces countryman Akira Nogami.

ETC: New to WCW are **One Man Gang** and **Owen Hart**, the younger brother of WWF's **Bret (Hit-man) Hart**. Both wrestled in the WWF under different names — Gang as Akeem and Hart as Blue Blazer. ... **Ricky (The Dragon) Steamboat** will make a cameo appearance at Wrestlemania.

Chad

3/13/91